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SOME RECENT EXPOSITORY LITERATURE.

Biblical exposition is not becoming a lost art. On the contrary it is becoming a recovered possession of our time. Crowded out of its rightful place for a season by the theological method of looking at the Bible, its star is again to be seen in the sky and in the ascendant. The old days of exposition, when puritan divines expanded the sacred text into tomes and played havoc with the principles of interpretation in the interests of present and temporary application, can never return. It is not desirable that they should. Their memory is kept green in the occasional grotesque effusions of some enthusiastic evangelists and sensational preachers. But as a living force this expository method is not to be found. It committed suicide—dying of an aggravated and inordinate affection for itself, pushing its performance to an extreme so extravagantly absurd, that common sense stepped forward and hurled it out of sight, enthroning abstract theology or meek commonplace in its stead.

But exposition has had a new birth into new conditions. The rise of modern exegesis and the development of the principles of grammatico-historical interpretation made a new library of commentaries necessary, and now they have come in to guide and foster the awakening desire of men for the expository handling of the Scriptures. In these circumstances a sudden growth of this kind of literature is observed. The books are so numerous as to make it difficult to keep up with them. It is purposed, at this time, to call attention to a few of these among the many and to draw out their distinctive characteristics.

Prominent among these works is a series of volumes appearing under the general title of "The Expositor's Bible." Of the general method and scope of this series readers of this journal have already been informed. Some of the volumes have been singularly excellent—others have been lamentably poor. Perhaps the lowest point has been touched in the two volumes of Prof. W. G. Blaikie on the Books of Samuel, which are not up to the mark in matters of exegesis and interpretation, and not seldom sacrifice the Scripture thought to the passion for hortatory and applicative material. The author is a scholarly man and a forcible writer. But he belongs to the old school, as his other writings, valuable and useful of their kind, clearly show.

The volume on Galatians* by Prof. Findlay, of Headingley College, stands well up among the other volumes. Were it not for the singularly high standard which this series maintains, this volume would call for particular commendation. Considering the subject with which it deals, it is, indeed, excellently planned. The book of Galatians is a theological pamphlet with its fundamental and permanent principles appearing in the forms of a temporary occasion. The expositor of its teachings must be one who can disentangle the thread of living thought from the outworn dress. He must feel these great truths with something of the earnestness of the apostle himself and be able to communicate them with fiery intensity of language. In all this Prof. Findlay seems noticeably fitted to his theme. If anything there is too much intensity—too sudden and violent turns from careful exegesis to vehement expression. The language sounds sometimes harsh and unpleasant. The impressions given, while not, indeed, wrong, are more striking

* THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS. By the Rev. Professor G. C. Findlay, B.A. New York : A. C. Armstrong and Son. Pp. 461. \$1.50.

and vivid than are warranted. Not only so, but the manifest result of so constant and unyielding a strain of enthusiasm, poured forth on each and every division and paragraph of his theme is, at last, to weaken attention and dissipate effectiveness. We feel, also, that the expositor has not infrequently wasted time and thought on matters of exegesis, fine points, which are not worth the expositor's or reader's prolonged attention. May it not also be suggested, though with hesitation, that the general impression is, on the whole, sacrificed to the particular thoughts? These are the chief matters of criticism in a work which by its spirit and energy, its careful and scholarly exegesis, and its vivid, striking turns of expression will prove a stimulus and a source of information to many biblical students.

An entirely different train of reflection and criticism is set in motion by the volume on the Epistles of St. John,* by Bishop Alexander, well known for his poetical gifts, who has written a brilliant and devout series of lectures on the Psalms. The volume is really a commentary which emphasizes the expository element. It has a unique character. Its usefulness will lie in its suggestiveness on particular topics rather than in its general availability as a thorough treatment of the Scripture in hand. The discourses are brief; they are partly introductory to the subject, partly discussions of particular texts, partly reflections on subjects rising out of the study of the material. Professing to be expository, the work is really topical. It is an interesting example of what some preachers do when they want to expound, but are so bound by old training and habit that exposition is only another name for discussion of some suggestive theme which the passage contains. No one can fail to be helped by the comments of this eloquent and forcible writer upon what the apostle says—but just *what he says* comes in only by implication and suggestion. Given a careful study of the epistles preliminary to this book and it is a helpful and stimulating comment on these writings. It isolates and develops salient thoughts. The *course* of thought is nowhere followed out and emphasized. It is to be said that St. John is not a clear reasoner and his connections of thought are intuitive rather than logical. It is true, also, that he burns with a few great thoughts, which are constantly set in new light, rather than presents a constant succession of new images and ideas. With these deductions allowed, it still remains that we have in this volume not properly an exposition, but a brilliant study of St. John's thought.

In coming to Revelation,† which is handled by Professor Milligan, one is at first struck with what seems to be an incongruous and unhappy choice. This Scripture needs a poet to interpret its glowing imagery, and here we listen to the most sober, scholarly and sensible of Scotchmen. But on second thought the judgment is reversed. To be sure Revelation has suffered from dry and dusty literalists. But the book has been handled far more ruthlessly by poetical and wild dreamers. The ideal commentator, who combines the best elements of the two extremes, must be still prayed for. Meanwhile the present writer is eminently fair and judicious in what he has done in this volume. He offers a somewhat new element in his method. In each discourse the Scripture material is not supposed to be all before the reader's eye or in his mind from the beginning. In every lecture upon a long section of Scripture, the author starts with a brief passage for exposition, explains and expounds it, and then into the body of his discourse inserts another section of the Scripture, and so on until each chapter or passage with which in that lecture he is occupied has been traversed. This course seems

* THE EPISTLES OF ST. JOHN: TWENTY-ONE DISCOURSES, WITH GREEK TEXT, COMPARATIVE VERSIONS, NOTES. By William Alexander, D.C.L. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son. \$1.50.

† THE BOOK OF REVELATION. By William Milligan, D.D. New York: the same. Pp. 392. \$1.50.

to be almost necessary in so varied and shifting a scene as the Book of Revelation exhibits, and it offers manifest advantages for the treatment of other books because it re-awakens and holds the reader's thought to the passage in hand. This is no small gain where large portions have to be massed for expository purposes. On the other hand it breaks up the course of thought, each particular passage forming a kind of barrier to cut off any way of approach from what has been left behind. The practical outcome, also, is to prevent any recapitulation of the subject of discourse or any opportunity to present as a whole the single impression made by the entire chapter or section. As to the substance of the exposition of Dr. Milligan it is not necessary to write at length. It is to be noted, however, that the element of application to present life and experience is almost wholly wanting. Hence the volume will instruct the mind more than it will please and edify the heart. And as such it is seriously deficient in spite of its scholarly and reasonable exegesis.

Of all these volumes the palm must be given to that by Dr. Dods, of Glasgow, on First Corinthians.* For a happy union of the practical and the scientific it is distinguished above all. Long passages are treated with so great a respect for the apostle's thought and so marvelous a capacity for fitting every detail of it into the picture, as well with so firm a grasp of its bearings upon practical life and a strong way of putting these edificatory and stimulating thoughts, that the interest is sustained while the meaning and scope of the Scripture is fully apprehended. Still there is felt here, also, the lack of that most important element—the unified impression of the whole epistle. If in Paul's letter there was no great ruling idea, purpose, conception, teaching, or whatever other word may be used to express what we are after, then this book is thoroughly complete. Good reasons might be given for that view. But, *a priori*, the epistle should contain a single thought. That was the way Paul's mind worked. He ramified a single conception. He developed a simple practical teaching. What that was in this case, if there was any, Dr. Dods does not intimate.

It may be that the tone of these reflections has been unreasonably critical. It must be remembered, however, that the attention here has been fixed upon one thing—the expository element in these volumes. While none of them has been fully satisfactory in this respect, warm testimony should be given, were this the time and place, to the wise choice of the men to write these several volumes as well as to the uniform excellence of their writing, the exceedingly high standard of attainment, reached in some cases and aimed at in all, and the union of reverence and scholarship displayed in the exegetical treatment of the Scripture. The American publishers are to be thanked and the American readers to be congratulated, that such books can be obtained at a price within the reach of all.

* THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS. By Marcus Dods, D.D. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son. Pp. 399. \$1.50.